

Hear me! ye oppressors!

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The Rights of Infants

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with appendix: A Contrast between Paine's *Agrarian Justice*, and Spence's *End of Oppression*.

Open thy mouth for the dumb. Prov.xxi.8.

"AND pray what are the Rights of Infants?" cry the haughty Aristocracy, sneering and tossing up their noses.

Woman. Ask the she-bears, and every she-monster, and they will tell you what the rights of every species of young are. — They will tell you, in resolute language and actions too, that their rights extend to a full participation of the fruits of the earth. They will tell you, and vindicate it likewise by deeds, that mothers have a right, at the peril of all opposers, to provide from the elements the proper nourishments of their young. And seeing this, shall we be asked what the Rights of Infants are? As if they had no rights? As if they were excrescences and abortions of nature? As if they had not a right to the milk of our breasts? Nor we a right to any food to make milk of? As if they had not a right to good nursing, to cleanliness, to comfortable cloathing and lodging? Villains! Why do you ask that aggravating question? Have not the foxes holes, and the birds of the air nests, and shall the children of men have not where to lay their heads? Have brute-mothers a right to eat grass, and the food they like best, to engender milk in their dugs, for the nourishment of their young and shall the mothers of infants be denied such a right? Is not this earth our common also, as well as it is the common of brutes? May we not eat herbs, berries, or nuts as well as other creatures? Have we not a right to hunt and prow! for prey with she-wolves? And have we not a right to fish with she-otters? Or may we not dig coals or cut wood for fuel? Nay, does nature provide a luxuriant and abundant feast for all her numerous tribes of animals except us? As if sorrow were our portion alone, and as if we and our helpless babes came into this world only to weep over each other?

Aristocracy (sneering). And is your sex also set up for pleaders of rights?

Woman. Yes, Molochs! Our sex were defenders of rights from the beginning. And though men, like other he-brutes, sink calmly into apathy respecting their offspring, you shall find nature, as it never was, so it never shall be extinguished in us. You shall find that we not only know our rights, but have spirit to assert them, to the downfall of you and all tyrants. And since it is so that the men, like he-asses, suffer themselves to be laden with as many pair of panyers of rents, tythes, etc., as your tender consciences please to lay upon them, we, even we, the females, will vindicate the rights of the species, and throw you and all your panyers in the dirt.

Aristocracy. So you wish to turn the cultivated world into a wilderness, that you may eat wild fruits and game like Indians?

Woman. No, Sophists, we do not want to be as Indians. But the natural fruits of the earth being the fruits of our undoubted common, we have an indefeasible right to, and we will no longer be deprived of them, without an equivalent.

Aristocracy. Do you not, in lieu of those wild productions, get bread, and mutton, and beef, and garden stuff, and all the refined productions and luxuries of art and labour; what reason then have you to complain?

Woman. Are you serious? Would you really persuade us that we have no reason to complain? Would you make us believe that we receive these productions of art and culture as a fair compensation for the natural produce of our common, which you deprive us of? Have we not to purchase these things before we enjoy them?

Aristocracy. Sure, woman, you do not expect the fruits of men's labours and ingenuity for nothing! Do not the farmers, in the first place, pay very high rents for their farms; and, in the next place, are they not at great trouble and expence in tilling and manuring the ground, and in breeding cattle; and surely you cannot expect that these men will work and toil, and lay out their money for you, for nothing.

Woman. And pray, ladies and gentlemen, who ever dreamt of hurting the farmers, or taking their provisions for nothing, except yourselves? It is only the privileged orders, and their humble imitators on the highway, who have the impudence to deprive men of their labours for nothing. No; if it please your noblenesses and gentlenesses, it is you, and not the farmers, that we have to reckon with. And pray now, your highnesses, who is it that receive those rents which you speak of from the farmers?

Arist. We, to be sure; we receive the rents.

Woman. You, to be sure! Who the D-v-l are you? Who gave you a right to receive the rents from our common?

Arist. Woman! Our fathers either fought for or purchased our estates.

Woman. Well confessed, villains! Now out of your own mouths will I condemn you, you wicked Molochs! And so you have the impudence to own yourselves the cursed brood of ruffians, who by slaughter and oppression, usurped the lordship and dominion of the earth, to the exclusion and starvation of weeping infants and their poor mothers? Or, at the best, the purchasers of those ill-got domains? O worse than Molochs! now let the blood of the millions of innocent babes who have perished through your vile usurpations be upon your murderous heads! You have deprived the mothers of nature's gifts, and farmed them out to farmers, and pocketed the money, as you audaciously confess. Yes, villains! you have treasured up the tears and groans of dumb, helpless, perishing, dying infants. O, you bloody landed interest! you band of robbers! Why do you call yourselves ladies and gentlemen? Why do you assume soft names, you beasts of prey? Too well do your emblazoned arms and escutcheons witness the ferocity of your bloody and barbarous origin! But soon shall those audacious Gothic emblems of rapine cease to offend the eyes of an enlightened people, and no more make an odious distinction between the spoilers and the spoiled. But, ladies and gentlemen, is it necessary, in order that we eat bread and mutton, that the rents should be received by you? Might not the farmers as well pay their rents to us, who are the natural and rightful proprietors? If, for the sake of cultivation, we are content to give up to farmers our wild fruits, our hunting grounds, our fish and game; our coalmines, and our forests, is it not equitable that we should have the rents in lieu thereof? If not, how can the farmers have the face to sell us again the produce of our own land?

Hear me! ye oppressors! ye who live sumptuously every day! ye, for whom the sun seems to shine, and the seasons change, ye for whom alone all human and brute creatures toil, sighing, but in vain, for the crumbs which fall from your overcharged tables; ye, for whom alone the heavens drop fatness, and the earth yields her increase; hearken to me, I say, ye who are not satisfied with usurping all that nature can yield; ye, who are insatiable as the grave; ye who would deprive every heart of joy but your own, I say hearken to me! Your horrid tyranny, your infanticide is at an end! Your grinding the faces of the poor, and your drinking the blood of infants, is at an end! The groans of the prisons, the groans of the camp, and the groans of the cottage, excited by your infernal policy, are at an end! And behold the whole earth breaks forth into singing at the new creation, at the breaking of the iron rod of aristocratic sway, and at the rising of the everlasting sun of righteousness!

And did you really think, my good gentlefolk, that you were the pillars that upheld the universe? Did you think that we would never have the wit to do without you? Did you conceive that we should never be able to procure bread and beef, and fuel, without your agency? Ah! my dear creatures, the magic spell is broke. Your sorceries, your witchcrafts, your priestcrafts, and all your juggling crafts, are at an end; and the Meridian Sun of Liberty bursts forth upon the astonished world, dispelling the accumulated mists of dreary ages, and leaves us the glorious blue expanse, of serene unclouded reason.

Well then, since you have compelled, since you have driven us, through your cruel bondage, to emancipate ourselves, we will even try to do without you, and deal with the honest farmers ourselves, who will find no difference, unless for the better, between paying their rents to us and to you. And whereas we have found our husbands, to their indelible shame, woefully negligent and deficient about their own rights, as well as those of their wives and infants, we women, mean to take up the business ourselves, and let us see if any of our husbands dare hinder us. Wherefore, you will find the business much more seriously and effectually managed in our hands than ever it has been yet. You may smile, tyrants, but you have juster cause to weep. For, as nature has implanted into the breasts of all mothers the most pure and unequivocal concern for their young, which no bribes can buy, nor threats annihilate, be assured we will stand true to the interest of our babes, and shame, woe, and destruction be to the pitiful varlet that dare obstruct us. For their sakes we will no longer make brick without straw, but will draw the produce of our estate. If we deprive ourselves of our common, in order that it may be cultivated, we ourselves will have the price thereof, that we may buy therewith, as far as it will go, the farmer's produce. And so far as our respective shares of the rent may be inadequate to the comfortable and elegant support of ourselves and infants, so far will we cheerfully, by our honest endeavours, in our several callings, make up the deficiency, and render life worth enjoying. To labour for ourselves and infants we do not decline; but we are sick of labouring for an insatiable aristocracy.

To convince your highnesses that our plan is well digested, I will lay it before you. You will find it very simple, but that is the sign of the greater perfection. As I said before, we women (because the men are not to be depended on) will appoint, in every parish, a committee of our own sex, (which we presume our gallant lock-jawed spouses and paramours will at least, for their own interest, not oppose,) to receive the rents of the houses and lands already tenanted, and also to let, to the best bidders, on seven years leases, such farms and tenements as may, from time to time, become vacant. Out of those rents we can remit to government so much per pound, according to the exigencies of the state, in lieu of all taxes; so that we may no longer have taxes nor tax-gatherers. Out of these rents we shall next pay all our builders and workmen that build or repair our houses; pave, cleanse, or light our streets; pay the salaries of our magistrates and other public officers. And all this we women shall do quarterly, without a bank or bank-notes, in ready money, when the rents are paid in; thus suffering neither state nor parish to run in debt. And as to the overplus, after all public expences are defrayed, we shall divide it fairly and equally among all the living souls in the parish, whether male or female; married or single; legitimate or illegitimate; from a day old to the extremest age; making no distinction between the families of rich farmers and merchants, who pay much rent for their extensive farms or premises, and the families of poor labourers and mechanics, who pay but little for their small apartments, cottages and gardens, but giving to the head of every family a full and equal share for every name under his roof.

And whereas births and funerals, and consequent sicknesses, are attended with expence, it seems requisite to allow, at quarter-day, to the head of every family, a full share for every child that may have been born in his house since the former quarter-day, though the infant may be then but a day old, and also, for every person who may have died since the former quarter-day, though the death should have happened but a day after it.

This surplus, which is to be dealt out again among the living souls in a parish every quarter-day, may be reasonably supposed to amount to full two-thirds of the whole sum of rents collected. But whatever it may amount to, such share of the surplus rents is the imprescriptible right of every human being in civilized society, as an equivalent for the natural materials of their common estate, which by letting to rent, for the sake of cultivation and improvement, they are deprived of.

Wherefore, now ladies and gentlemen, you see the glorious work is done! and the rights of the human species built on so broad and solid a basis, that all your malice will not be able to prevail against them! Moreover, when we begin with you, we will make a full end of your power at once. We will not impolitically tamper with the lion, and pluck out a tooth now and then, as some propose to melt down your strength by degrees, which would only irritate you to oppose us with all the power you had remaining. No; we will begin where we mean to end, by depriving you instantaneously, as by an elective shock, of every species of revenue from lands, which will universally, and at once, be given to the parishes, to be disposed of by and for the use of the inhabitants, as said before.

But yet be not cast down, my good ladies and gentlemen, all this is done for the sake of system, not revenge or retaliation, for we wish not to reduce you to beggary, as you do us, for we will leave you all your moveable riches and wealth, all your gold and silver, your rich clothes and furniture; your corn and cattle, and every thing that does not appertain to the land as a fixture, for these, you know, must come to the parish with our estates. So that you see you will still be the richest part of the community, and may, by your cheerful acquiescence, be much more happy than you are now under the existing unjust system of things. But if, by foolish and wicked opposition, you should compel us, in our own defence, to confiscate even your moveables, and perhaps also to cut you off, then let your blood be upon your own heads, for we shall be guiltless. It will therefore be your interest and wisdom to submit peaceably, and fraternize cheerfully with us as fellow-citizens. For, instead of you then having the revenues of the country to carry on war against us, as you have now, the parishes will then have these revenues to carry on the war against you. And as to your moveable property, we are not afraid of it, for it would soon melt away in supporting you in a state of hostility against the strength and standing revenues of the country, unburthened with debts and pensions. So prepare yourselves peaceably to acquiesce in the new system of things, which is fast approaching. And when you shall hear of the blessed decree being passed by the people, that the land is from that day forth parochial property, join chorus with your glad fellow-creatures, and joyfully partake in the universal happiness.

The Golden Age, so fam'd by men of yore,
 Shall now be counted fabulous no more.
 The tyrant lion like an ox shall feed,
 And lisping Infants shall tam'd tygers lead:
 With deadly asps shall sportive sucklings play,
 Nor ought obnoxious blight the blithesome day.
 Yes, all that prophets e'er of bliss foretold,
 And all that poets ever feign'd of old,
 As yielding joy to man, shall now be seen,
 And ever flourish like an evergreen.
 Then, Mortals, join to hail great Nature's plan,
 That fully gives to Babes those Rights it gives to Man.

Chorus. - To the Tune of "Sally in our Alley".

Then let us all join heart in hand,
 Through country, town, and city; Of every sex and every age,
 Young men and maidens pretty. To haste this Golden Age's reign,
 On every hill and valley, Then Paradise shall greet our eyes,
 Through every street and alley.

CONCLUSION

BUT stop, don't let us reckon without our host; for Mr Paine will object to such an equal distribution of the rents. For says he, in his *Agrarian Justice*, the public can claim but a *Tenth Part* of the value of the landed property as it now exists, with its vast improvements of cultivation and building. But why are we to be put off now with but a Tenth Share? Because, says Mr Paine, it has so improved in the hands of private proprietors as to be of ten times the value it was of in its natural state. But may we not ask who improved the land? Did the proprietors alone work and toil at this improvement? And did we labourers and our forefathers stand, like Indians and Hottentots, idle spectators of so much public-spirited industry? I suppose not. Nay, on the contrary, it is evident to the most superficial enquirer that the labouring classes ought principally to be thanked for every improvement.

Indeed, if there had never been any slaves, any vassals, or any day-labourers employed in building and tillage, then the proprietors might have boasted of having themselves created all this gay scene of things. But the case alters amazingly, when we consider that the earth has been cultivated either by slaves, compelled, like beasts, to labour, or by the indigent objects whom they first exclude from a share in the soil, that want may compel them to sell their labour for daily bread. In short, the great may as well boast of fighting their battles as of cultivating the earth.

The toil of the labouring classes first produces provisions, and then the demand of their families creates a market for them. Therefore it will be found that it is the markets made by the labouring and mechanical tribes that have improved the earth. And once take away these markets, or let all the labouring people, like the Israelites, leave the country in a body, and you would immediately see from what cause the country had been cultivated, and so many goodly towns and villages built.

You may suppose that after the emigration of all these beggarly people, every thing would go on as well as before: that the farmer would continue to plough, and the town landlord to build as formerly. I tell you nay; for the farmer could neither proceed without labourers nor find purchasers for his corn and cattle. It would be just the same with the building landlord, for he could neither procure workmen to build, nor tenants to pay him rent.

Behold then your grand, voluptuous nobility and gentry, the arch cultivators of the earth; obliged, for lack of servants, again to turn Gothic hunters, like their savage forefathers. Behold their palaces, temples, and towns, mouldering into dust, and affording shelter only to wild beasts; and their boasted, cultivated fields and garden, degenerated into a howling wilderness.

Thus we see that the consumption created by the mouths, and the backs, of the poor despised multitude, contributes to the cultivation of the earth, as well as their hands. And it is also the rents that they pay that builds the towns, and not the racking building landlord. Therefore, let us not in weak commiseration be biassed by the pretended philanthropy of the great, to the resignation of our dearest rights. And if our estates have improved in their hands, during their officious guardianship, the D-v-1 thank them; for it was done for their own sakes, not for ours, and can be no just bar against us recovering our rights.

APPENDIX

A Contrast between Paine's *Agrarian Justice*, and Spence's *End of Oppression*.

Both being built on the same indisputable principle, viz. that the

Land is the common Property of Mankind.

Under the system of **Agrarian Justice**, The people will, as it were, sell their birth-right for a mess of porridge, by accepting of a paltry consideration in lieu of their rights.

*Under the system of the **End of Oppression**, The people will receive, without deduction, the whole produce of their common inheritance.*

Under the first, The people will become supine and careless in respect of public affairs, knowing the utmost they can receive of the public money.

Under the second, The people will be vigilant and watchful over the public expenditure, knowing that the more there is saved their dividends will be the larger.

Under the first, The people will be more like pensioned emigrants and French priests than interested natives.

Under the second, The people will be all intent upon the improvement of their respective parishes, for the sake of the increased shares of the revenues, which on that account they will receive.

Under the first, The people cannot derive right of suffrage in national affairs from their compromisory stipends.

Under the second, Universal suffrage will be inseparably attached to the people both in parochial and national affairs, because the revenues both parochial and national will be derived immediately from their common landed property.

Under the first, The government may be either absolute monarchy, aristocracy, democracy or mixed.

Under the second, The government must of necessity be democratic.

Under the first, All the complexities of the present public establishments which support such hosts of placemen, will not only still continue, but also the evils of them will be greatly enhanced by the very system of Agrarian Justice.

Under the second, There can be but two descriptions of public officers, parochial and national, and those but few in number, and on moderate salaries.

Under the first, There can exist two spirits, incompatible in a free state, the intolerant and overbearing spirit of aristocracy, and the sneaking unmanly spirit of conscious dependence.

Under the second, There will exist only the robust spirit of independence, mellowed and tempered by the presence and check of equally independent fellow-citizens.

Under the first, The destructive profligacy of the great, and the wretched degeneracy of the poor, will still continue, and will increase, to the pitiable unhappiness of both parties.

Under the second, All the virtues being the natural offspring of a general and happy mediocrity, will at once step forth into use, and progressively increase their blessed influence among men.

Under the first, Taxes, both directly and indirectly, will not only be demanded, but will be increased to the utmost the people can possibly bear, let trade and seasons be ever so prosperous.

Under the second, There can be no taxes, nor expenses for collecting them, because the government would be supported by a poundage from the rents which each parish would send quarterly to the national treasury, free of all expense; thus leaving the price of all commodities unencumbered with any addition but the price of labour

Under the first, The poor would still continue, through despair, unambitious to arise out of their hopeless state of abject wretchedness and vulgarity.

Under the second, The lowest and most profligate having such frequent opportunities, by the aid of their quarterly dividends, of starting into industrious and decent modes of life, could not always resist the influence of the general virtue every where displayed, without some time or other following the example.

Under the first, Children will still be considered as grievous burdens in poor families.

Under the second, As both young and old share equally alike of the parish revenues, children and aged relations living in a family will, especially in rich parishes, where the dividends are large, through high rents or the production of mines etc., be accounted as blessings.

Under the first, If the aristocratic assistance afforded by charity-schools, in the education of poor children be withdrawn, the labouring classes will degenerate into barbarous ignorance.

Under the second, If the people are not generally learned it must be their own fault, as their inexhaustible means of comfortable subsistence must furnish also the means of education.

Under the first, The poor must still look up for aristocratic benefactions of rotten potatoes and spoiled rice, and other substitutes for bread in the times of scarcity, to preserve their wretched existence.

Under the second, What with the annihilation of taxes and the dividends of the parochial rents, together with the honest guardianship of their popular government, we may reasonably suppose that the people will rarely be driven to the dire necessity of using a substitute for bread.

Under the first, After admitting that the earth belongs to the people, the people must nevertheless compromise the matter with their Conquerors and oppressors, and still suffer them to remain as a distinct and separate body among them, in full possession of their country.

Under the second, After insisting that the land is public property, the people's oppressors must either submit to become

undistinguishable in the general mass of citizens or fly the country.

Under the first, If foreign and domestic trade increase, the productions of the land will increase in price, of which the landed interest will reap the advantage, by raising the rents in due proportion until the whole benefit thereof centres in them.

Under the second, If foreign and domestic trade increase, the price of commodities will in proportion also increase, and the rents of course will rise, but this increase will revert back to the body of the people, by increasing their quarterly dividends.

Under the first, All the aristocratic monopolies in trade, in privileges, and government, will continue.

Under the second, There can be no monopolies; but a fair, salutary, and democratic competition will pervade everything.

Under the first, A timid and acquiescing spirit must be promoted among the people as now, lest they should discover the dissimilarity between their natural rights and enjoyments.

Under the second, The justness and consistency of affairs will invite, nay, challenge, the most vigorous and logical enquiries, and will draw forth, uncramped, the utmost powers of the mind.

Under the first, Domestic trade will be far from its natural height, because multitudes of the people will be poor and beggarly, and unable to purchase numberless articles of use and luxury that their wants and inclinations would prompt them to wish for.

Under the second, Domestic trade would be at amazing pitch, because there would be no poor; none but would be well clothed, lodged, and fed: and the whole mass of rents, except a trifle to the government, being circulated at home, in every parish, every quarter, would cause such universal prosperity as would enable every body to purchase not only the necessities of life, but many elegancies and luxuries.

Under the first, The fund proposed by Paine will require a great number of placemen of various descriptions to manage it, and who being chosen, as they must be, by the ministry and their friends, will very much increase the already enormous influence of governments.

Under the second, The government can have very little influence by places, because the parish officers will be chosen by the parishioners; and all the complex machinery of financiering and stock-jobbing; all the privileged trading companies and corporate towns, which are the roots of influence and corruption, would be abolished.

Under the first, The rich would abolish all hospitals, charitable funds, and parochial provision for the poor, telling them, that they now have all that their great advocate, Paine, demands, as their rights, and what he exultingly deems as amply sufficient to ameliorate their condition and render them happy, by which the latter end of our reformation will be worse than the beginning.

Under the second, The quarterly dividends, together with the abolishment of all taxes, would destroy the necessity of public charities; but if any should be thought necessary, whether to promote learning, or for other purposes, the parochial and national funds would be found at all times more than sufficient.
